More Notes:
Part 2
Bel and the Dragon

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Here, in part 2, we look deeper into the writings concerning **the idol Bel**.

The first part of the 1611 Scripture text of **Bel and the Dragon** is shown at the beginning.

The expanded notes follow.

The Scripture text is separated from the notes so either may flow more easily when reading than where they are combined, as they are in Part 1.

To read part 1 of this series, view, ***“What Does it Mean?: Bel and the Dragon”*** . There, the notes immediately follow each verse.

Bel And The Dragon

Verses of the Chapter				
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NOTES

1st Half: The Idol Bel

1:1

And king Astyages was gathered to his fathers, and Cyrus of Persia received his kingdom.

1:2

And Daniel conversed with the king, and was honored above all his friends.

1:3

Now the Babylons had an idol, called Bel, and there were spent upon him every day twelve great measures of fine flour, and forty sheep, and six vessels of wine.

1:4

And the king worshipped it and went daily to adore it:

but Daniel worshipped his own God. And the king said unto him, “Why dost not thou worship Bel?”

1:5

Who answered and said, Because I may not worship idols made with hands, but the living God, who hath created the heaven and

the earth, and hath sovereignty over all flesh.

1:6

Then said the king unto him, Thinkest thou not that Bel is a living God? seest thou not how much he eateth and drinketh every day?

1:7

Then Daniel smiled, and said, O king, be

not deceived: for this is but clay within, and brass without, and did never eat or drink any thing.

1:8

So the king was wroth, and called for his priests, and said unto them, If ye tell me not who this is that devoureth these expenses,
ye shall die.

1:9

But if ye can certify me that Bel devoureth them, then Daniel shall die: for he hath spoken blasphemy against Bel. And Daniel said unto the king, Let it be according to thy word.

1:10

Now the priests of Bel were threescore

and ten, beside their wives and children. And the king went with Daniel into the temple of Bel.

1:11

So Bel's priests said, Lo, we go out: but thou, O king, set on the meat, and make ready the wine, and shut the door fast and seal it with thine own signet;

1:12

And to morrow when thou comest in, if thou findest not that Bel hath eaten up all, we will suffer death: or else Daniel, that speaketh falsely against us.

1:13

And they little regarded it: for under the table they had made a privy

entrance, whereby they entered in continually, and consumed those things.

1:14

So when they were gone forth, the king set meats before Bel. Now Daniel had commanded his servants to bring ashes, and those they strewed throughout all

the temple in the presence of the king alone: then went they out, and shut the door, and sealed it with the king's signet, and so departed.

1:15

Now in the night came the priests with their wives and children, as they were wont to do, and did eat and rink up all.

1:16

In the morning betime the king arose, and Daniel with him.

1:17

And the king said, Daniel, are the seals whole? And he said, Yea, O king, they be whole.

1:18

And as soon as he

had opened the door, the king looked upon the table, and cried with a loud voice, Great art thou, O Bel, and with thee is no deceit at all.

1:19

Then laughed Daniel, and held the king that he should not go in, and said, Behold now the pavement, and mark well whose

footsteps are these.

1:20

And the king said, I see the footsteps of men, women, and children. And then the king was angry,

1:21

And took the priests with their wives and children, who shewed him the privy doors, where they came in, and consumed such

things as were upon the table.

1:22

Therefore the king slew them, and delivered Bel into Daniel's power, who destroyed him and his temple.

NOTES

NOTES

One king died and another, Cyrus of Persia, became the new king.

Daniel had personal conversations with the king.

The Great Bible says he ate “at the king’s table”. Traditionally, and sometimes

culturally, when people eat together, it suggests a closer relationship, or the pursuit of one. Therefore, that very phrasing implies Daniel had a more personal relationship with the king than just conversing with him.

The Great Bible words the king and

Daniel's bond as follows:
Daniel did eat at the king's table and was held in reverence above all his friends".

This wording better clarifies that Daniel was favored by the king more than any of the kings other friends as opposed to the 1611's

phraseology that may lead the reader to interpret the verse differently.

That version could be understood to mean Daniel was more respected than his own (Daniel's own) friends rather than the king respecting Daniel more than the king's other friends, as the Great Bible seems to indicate.

It may not be that important of an issue, but where clarity is sought, the Great Bible seems to help here.

Also, the Great Bible begins the book, The Story of Bel, by immediately addressing the connection between Daniel and the king and makes no

mention of one king dying and another becoming the new king.

The only thing that knowledge may impact (one king dying and another becoming king) is, perhaps, that Cyrus was a new king and as such, he may have been inexperienced at the job of being

king. That may account for some of his latter actions.

Moving on. The Babylonians had an idol that was called Bel and every single day, a lot of food was sacrificed to him.

Twelve large scoops of the best flour, forty sheep, and six

containers of wine was given to the idol.

The Great Bible says there were 12 cakes, 40 sheep, and 6 large pots of wine spent, sacrificed, to the idol Bel. The only difference in the 1611 and the Great Bible here is the “fine flour” vs. the “cakes” and the “vessels” of wine vs. the “pots” of

wine. Since cakes are, generally, made from flour and pots are vessels, there is no discrepancy.

As King Cyrus worshipped and adored the idol Bel everyday and Daniel only worshipped his own God, the king asked Daniel why he did not worship Bel too.

Quite often people value a thing so much that they want others to share in that experience. It's that way with sports and with any hobby That sort of, "I'm happy. I'm right. Join me or you're weird" mentality is especially evident in politics. It's even that way with religion. In our story, the king

was so engrossed in worshipping Bel that he wanted his friend, Daniel, to worship it as well.

Similarly, as with people's passions, positions, and personal beliefs, sometimes the object of their enthusiasm is more façade than fact. As it turned out, the king's bravado

for Bel was not mutual. Daniel responded to the king's question of why he did not worship Bel by saying he would not worship anything that was made by the hands of humans. Daniel insisted he worshipped the Living God, further stating that his God was the one who

created heaven and earth and who had authority over all things which were made of flesh.

To be fair, Daniel may have felt the same about his God with the same conviction as the king felt about Bel. King Cyrus was so convinced that he was right that he verbally shot back to

Daniel that he found it to be absolutely unrealistic that Daniel didn't believe Bel was a "living" god.

After all, from what the king had "seen with his own eyes", Bel not only ate and drank, he also required very large amounts of very expensive foods and drinks every single day.

To the king, this was no coincidence. This disappearance of food and drink was so consistent and so apparent that there was no doubt that what he believed to be true was correct and absolute. Further, he had faith in the priests who apparently had assured him that seeing was believing

and that what he was seeing was the full picture.

As sincere and as devoted as the king was, Daniel believed king Cyrus was being deceived. Daniel told him just that.

He seemed to have been polite, but what he did would have been considered very politically incorrect in

present times. He said something significant, but what did he NOT say?

He did not say, “Well, if that works for you, that’s fine. As long as you’re happy, I’m happy. You believe your way and I’ll believe mine.”

Depending on the social system there

at that time, that may have been an acceptable sentiment. It's not unreasonable for different people to think and believe differently concerning anything, including matters of religion and belief.

Conceivably, Daniel could have been more diplomatic and

less, what some might call, “dogmatic”, but he chose to be direct and truthful in his response to the king. That, alone, was a risk as the king could have become offended and, unlike disagreeing with an another person of the same social status, the king had the power to retaliate.

Had Cyrus been petty and too immature to at least *consider* the possibility, he could have easily punished Daniel for two things: smiling (which could have been seen as belittling and personally insulting) and for degrading his highly revered deity when

Daniel said:

Oh, king. Don’t be deceived. Bel is just clay on the inside and brass on the outside. Further, it has never eaten anything and it has never had anything to drink.

Did Daniel know the actual make-up of the idol? Did he know the precise materials used in the making of

Bel? Surely he would not have put himself in such precarious situation with the king without having some prior knowledge of facts about Bel's construction, would he?

So, the king was furious. He didn't turn his anger toward Daniel though.

Instead, he called for the priests to tell him who was eating and drinking the large quantity of expensive foods and wine.

King Cyrus also proclaimed that if they could prove it was, indeed, Bel who was consuming the sacrifices made to him, they would live and Daniel would be put to death for

blaspheming a living god. However, if they were found to have deceived the king, it would cost them their own lives.

The story doesn't say what the priests would be legally charged with, but it would likely be for perjury and theft (based on laws common to most

societies). Of course, that didn't matter there. They would be executed—no trial, no appeals, and no death row. If they lied, they died. The priests and Daniel all understood what was at stake.

There were 70 priests of the idol. Their mission apparently was the upkeep of

Bel, which would include keeping it “fed” and likely doing general maintenance. Those priests had wives and children, but no number was given for them. For the sake of a degree of equality, and as wives and children were people too, we could estimate that there was one wife to each priest and two

children per couple. That would mean approximately 280 people were being treated as a god.

It's not crucial information; it just gives a clearer view of the story.

Okay, so the king and Daniel went to the temple of Bel together. The priests told the king they

were leaving the temple. That would be done so the king could personally witness that the priests had already left from inside of the temple which was dedicated to Bel.

Before leaving, the priests instructed king Cyrus to verify that the food and wine were plentiful

and to then seal the door tightly using his own “signet”.

A definition of signet as it was used in Bible versions is:

a seal or stamp, usually, one belonging to a king or other ruler. It was used as a symbol of authority and could be used to make official documents or mark items of value.

In this case, the “signet” may have been the king’s unique seal or stamp. It would be used to show a mark if there were a break much like when tape is split, it will sometimes show a break mark.

Waxy seals are used on some official documents in recent

history and possibly even today. Generally, however, the modern document “seals”, in much of North America, are deep impressions of the paper itself, which are formed by a device squeezing the paper tightly, as is in the case of notary seals. Also, sometimes glue-

backed stickers are used as seals to ensure the prevention of tampering.

The word “signet” originates from the Latin word “signum” meaning “sign” and that’s the point here. A sign was needed to show the door had not been opened. That was intended to

indicate no one but Bel had taken in the wine and food.

The priests again acknowledged the king's decision to have Bel's deity tested. They said, in agreement with what the king had already established, that if the food and drink were still there on the next day, they would

die, but if it were all gone, Daniel would die.

Again, the priest's test was that if the food and drink remained until the next day, it would mean Bel was, indeed, a living god which, because he was living, he had need of sustenance. Were that to be

proven, it was to mean they had been truthful the entire time and that Daniel had lied on “them”.

There are two very important points to observe here.

First, the priest’s, themselves, devised the test. They decided what the test would be which

was to prove their innocence.

Of course they weren't going to come up with a test that would expose their guilt, right? They set the test to show only what they wanted shown.

It was never impartial. It was never really a test. It was more like a stage set where actors only

play their given parts of a preset script.

This kind of craftiness is done very often. When a company wants to prove its' product is not harmful, for example, they don't report their findings concerning all of the people who have become sick or died. They only submit

to the public the success stories or only the data that shows a few, if any, issues with their product. They pick and choose what is tested, how it is tested, and what is revealed of the results.

That's what the priests of Bel were doing. Since they

created the test, they felt they could control the outcome.

Secondly, notice how they were not at all concerned about blasphemy against Bel, as the king was, but only about being found to be liars which would mean their deaths.

In saying the king

would find out Daniel had lied on them, they, themselves, suggested they were liars because Daniel never said the priests were dishonest. From this book, Bel and the Dragon, Daniel only said the idol was not living, was made of clay and brass, and did not eat or drink. He never said the priests were

consuming the items nor did he say anything about them personally. As we shortly discover, there was a reason the priests of Bel took the inquiry personally.

Now here's something else to think about:

Daniel couldn't have initiated an

investigation of the validity of Bel as a “living” god. Such research had to be started as a result of the king’s decision. Had the king been more insightful, he would have approached the priests without them knowing Daniel had anything to do with it. Daniel still could have been involved,

but the priests didn't need to know. The king made Daniel a target by letting the priests know he was involved in the questioning of Bel.

Why would that matter if either Daniel or the priests would be killed anyway?

Daniel being a target would be a issue later

in the story, but just think about the following example:

Khalil and Jabar are next door neighbors in a small apartment building where parking is a constant issue. The landlord has assigned only one parking space to each tenant in an effort to address the matter.

Khalil doesn’t like following rules, but he doesn’t like getting caught breaking the rules either so he parks one car over two spaces when he knows the landlord will not see it. However, when there’s a chance the landlord may visit the property, he parks neatly in his own

parking space.

This annoys Jabar to no end because, though he's reported the problem, whenever the landlord is around, he only sees that Khalil is playing nicely—he's following the rules. The landlord only sees that Khalil has parked in his own

space and even wonders why Jabar is falsely accusing Khalil.

One day Jabar gets the idea to simply take a picture of the cars which shows exactly how Khalil is parking. The picture is then shown to the landlord. Now the landlord knows what's been going

on behind his back. The landlord tells Khalil to stop parking in both spaces. Khalil vehemently denies doing that so the landlord finally says, “I know you’re doing it because Jabar showed me a picture!”

Khalil is caught in his lies and that makes him furious. He’s not

angry with the landlord. He's not upset with his own decision to park where he wants when the landlord isn't looking. No, he's angry with Jabar for taking a picture—for proving that Khalil is a sneaky liar.

Meanwhile, they're both still neighbors. They live right next

door to one another and the walls are so thin that they each can hear the other talking from their own apartments with doors and windows closed.

Khalil is fuming and onfronts Jabar for taking a picture of the cars and showing it to the landlord.

After that, tensions never cease until Jabar finally moves out (though Jabar moves to a better community anyway).

If the landlord had handled the parking situation better, Jabar would not have become a target. Similarly, if the king had handled the situation concerning

the priests and Bel's temple better, Daniel would not have been made a target which, again, happens later in the book.

Even so, we'll also discover that, as with our example of Khalil and Jabar, things can work out for the best, despite difficulties and opposition, in the end.

Now, we continue to look at what went on with the priests.

The 1611 says the priests, “…little regarded it: for under the table they had made a privy entrance, whereby they entered in continually, and consumed those things.”

The priests didn't care about Bel at all because they knew there was a hidden entrance under the table. It allowed them to get into and out of the temple of Bel without ever going through the door that the king would, himself, guarantee was locked.

That's how they continuously

consumed the large amounts of costly foods and drinks.

The Great Bible clarifies by saying, “the priests thought themselves sure enough, for under the altar, they had made a privy entrance and there went they in ever, and did eat up what there was.”

Look at that. The priests “thought themselves sure enough…” They were certain they could get away with their deception. They were confident. Why? They were so convinced within themselves about proving Bel as being a “living” god to the king’s satisfaction because they knew they had a

private entrance under the table (or “alter” as the Great Bible words it) inside Bel’s temple.

Interestingly, in the English language, the phrase “under the table” is a slang way to describe activities which are secretly done or are illegal. That private entrance

was both secret as well as illegal.

With the priests' test set and them having left the temple, the king placed plenty of food and wine out for Bel.

We don't have any indication that Daniel knew exactly where the food was going, but we do know he

did not believe an idol, which he felt was only clay and brass, was consuming it. Had Daniel known of the concealed temple door, he may have simply shown that to the king. So it’s very likely Daniel did not know the details. He probably did not know the location of an opening to a

tunnel which would go to and from the secret temple access. Maybe Daniel felt it was illogical that an object could eat. Maybe he just strongly believed he worshipped the, one and only, Living God and therefore nothing else, least of all an obviously handmade idol, could be the same Living God.

That would make sense considering Daniel believed, based on Jewish history, that his God abhorred idols.

Whatever Daniel knew, thought he knew, or believed, he had to prove it. His very life was at stake. He had to have his own means of solving the mystery

of the missing food and wine.

Unknown to the priests, Daniel had his assistants spread ashes all over the temple floor. That was done, of course, after the priests had already gone and only in the presence of the king. Since the priests knew nothing of Daniel creating his own test, they had

gone away from the temple totally confident that not only would they continue to fool the king, but also that their threat of exposure, Daniel, would soon no longer be a problem.

Once the ashes covered the floor, and apparently the assistants had gone,

the king and Daniel secured the temple door with the king's signet and left the temple. When the door was locked and sealed, no human remained inside—at that time.

During the night, the priests, their wives, and their children entered the temple through the secret

door which was located under the table. They ate and drank everything available. That was their normal routine and they didn't deviate in any way. They ate as much as they would normally eat and they left the way they usually left.

Early the next morning, the king

arose from sleeping and so did Daniel.

There's a small gap of information which may or may not have been helpful had it ever been written or translated into English.

We are not told how long Daniel and the king slept, if they slept peacefully and

in confidence or fretfully from anxieties, if they both slept in the same building, how far where they slept was from Bel's temple, or how long it took them to return to the temple.

The story jumps to the king and Daniel being present at

the temple and examining the seals. In the later verse, the account says seals (plural) rather than the singular seal, as it did before. This is the case in both the 1611 KJV as well as the Great Bible. The number of seals, whether just one or more than one, may not may not make much difference in

the overall story, but it would seem more consistent if the, at least in the same version, singular remained singular rather than being changed to plural.

So, the king asked Daniel if the seals which had been placed on Bel's temple door were still

intact and Daniel responded in the affirmative. The seals had not been broken.

Once the door was opened, the king immediately looked in the direction of the table-like altar. When he saw there was no food, he and excitedly and quite loudly exclaimed that Bel was great and that was a fact. He

boomed that there had been no deceit in any shape or form—none at all!

Daniel, however, was much less enthusiastic. He was neither impressed nor convinced. In fact, he laughed.

He then restrained the king from entering the temple while urging him to

pay close attention to the floor and asked him whose footsteps those were which showed on the floor.

The king replied that he saw the footprints of men, women, and children.

It’s no surprise that seeing those footprints really angered king Cyrus

because it was that very moment when he realized he had been duped by the priests. He had been led to believe the hand-made idol, Bel, was a living god who required all of that costly food and drink.

It was clear that the priests had insulted and angered the king; they had made a fool

of him. Even so, he wanted clarification. He had seen proof of trickery, but wanted to know exactly HOW it had been done.

Some might wonder what difference it would make for the king to find out the particulars since he already knew he'd been conned. He knew he had been

lied to and intentionally deceived so why wasn't that enough?

As with many people, there is a need to know the WHY and HOW even when they already know the WHAT of a situation.

When we read or hear current news stories, we may often ask

ourselves, “Why did he do it? How did he do it?” We do that even when we already know what was done.

Sometimes knowing “what” was done is just not enough. We may feel confused or even be in denial when a bad thing happens that is personal to us. We

may be found asking, “WHY”?! “How did that happen”? With more and more news of heinous crime and hatred popping up every day, just knowing “what” occurred may not seem sufficient.

Being aware of the “why” or “how” often gives us the opportunity to stop

a situation from happening again.

Whenever there are multiple incidents of a situation which causes harm to those who are considered valuable in a society, the “why” and “how” of it is investigated thoroughly. The “what happened” is

not sufficient to prevent repeats of it.

Policy makers are very concerned about the “why” and the “how” of the daily lives of people so they may better monitor and redirect behaviors.

So, king Cyrus brought the priests

and their wives and their children all together and demanded an explanation.

We aren't told why they finally confessed or how long it took for them to break their silence.

We, the readers of this account, do not know how the priests felt at all. Were they

totally surprised at being found out? We don't know if the priests were thinking that if they told the truth, the king may show mercy and spare their lives.

We don't know if any were tortured to make them own up to their deceit.

We also do not know if the involved

women and children were the slightest bit aware that they were part of a scam every time they went to the temple to eat.

How much did they know about what they were doing?

How did these women and children keep their source of food hidden from others? It would

seem that one day one of the children would have casually told his or her friend how good the food was at the temple of Bel and that would lead the friend to tell the parent which, in turn, would start talk and questions from friends of friends until the whole secret was no longer a secret.

It didn't happen that way, but the secret was out, nonetheless, and the priests had to suffer consequence of their deception.

King Cyrus killed the priests and allowed Daniel to decide what to do about the idol and the temple which was dedicated to that idol.

It seems that Daniel didn't hesitate on what to do about Bel and it's temple. We aren't told that he discussed it with anyone, prayed about it, thought about, or even considered it.

Some may have thought keep the building. Maybe it could have been cleaned and

dedicated to Daniel's Living God.

In today's times, ownership of buildings change often. Any business, including a religious one, can take over a building and change the product sold or service provided vastly. An ice cream shop can become an auto repair shop.

Likely, that wasn't even a possibility for Daniel. He may have wanted nothing more to do with Bel.

Daniel destroyed both the idol as well as its temple.

At least in this account, we are not told "how" Daniel destroyed that particular idol and temple, but it was

gone and so were it's priests.

It all seemed so final, but the idolatry was not over as we'll see in the second part of the book of the Idol Bel and the Dragon.

In "More Notes: Part 3 Bel and the Dragon", we delve more deeply the final part of the

book.

Also, a scan of the 1540 Great Bible is available there.

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